

"The westerners who live in the neighborhood of the Forest Preserves are the men (and women) who in the last resort will determine whether or not these preserves are to be permanent." Theodore Roosevelt

Summer 2006

The Elkhorns Working Group Newsletter



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Special points of interest:

- Meetings are held the 2nd Thursday of the month.



Message from the Chair

Greetings! Welcome to our first edition of the Elkhorns Working Group (EWG) Newsletter! The Elkhorns Working Group was created as an independent volunteer citizen's group to review and make recommendations to government agencies regarding elk and livestock management strategies in the Elkhorns. The nineteen members of our group represent a broad and diverse set of local and public interests. Discussions do get lively. Our group's mission has evolved—humility prevents me from claiming it was intelligent

design—and we are also addressing other management issues.

Our recommendations are made collaboratively and by consensus. We work hard to devise innovative solutions that are in the best interest of the common thread that links us all together—our love of the Elkhorns and the unique environment it has provided our communities in the past and present. We welcome your input!

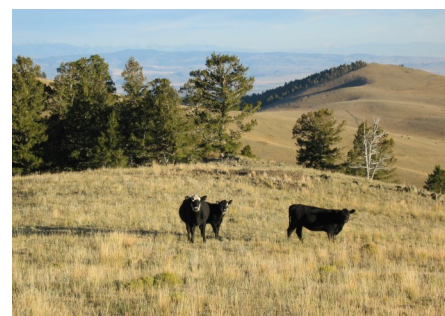
Brud Smith

The Elkhorns Working Group—Our Roots

There were elk in the Elkhorn Mountains when the first white man arrived in the 1860's. Meat hunters harvested these elk, selling the meat to the miners in the mining communities. By 1890, there were no elk left in the Elkhorns. Cattle and sheep had started grazing these lands by then and the mountain range became part of the National Forest Service system in the early 1900's.

Essentially there were no elk in the Elkhorns until 1939, when 38 elk from Yellowstone National park were transplanted into the Elkhorns. Elk numbers have been on the rise ever since. Very slowly at first, 150 in 1944, 300 in 1960 and 600 in 1978; and then in the 1980's the elk population increased dramatically to 1725 in 1988. The numbers have remained fairly steady since 1988, peaking at 2850 in 1996 and down to 1700 in 2002.

Conflict between elk and ranchers began as the increasing numbers of elk began encroaching on the ranchlands on the periphery of the mountain range. By fall the



elk started coming down onto private hay and pasture lands and staying through the winter and into late spring, harvesting forage the rancher wanted for his cattle.

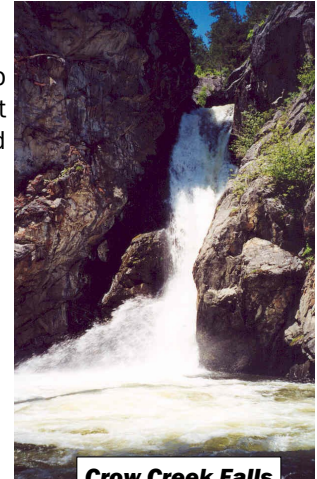
Ranchers started voicing their concerns regarding the number of elk on their private lands to MDFWP and USFS. This discourse culminated in the summer of 2001, when the various parties met in disagreement before the MDFWP Commission. The commission instructed the various parties to come to the table together and reach agreement where they could and in so doing come up with recommendations to resolve these ongoing issues.

Who Are We

The Elkhorn Working Group consists of 18 members that were originally convened in February of 2002. The purpose of the group is to develop and provide collaborative recommendations on wildlife/livestock management strategies in the Elkhorns to resource managers and agencies. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the Helena, Beaverhead Deer-Lodge Forests, BLM, Lewis and Clark, Jefferson and Broadwater Counties and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation sponsored the group originally. Following the release of a series of recommendations to the agencies in 2002,

the Working Group became an independent entity with elected officers.

Membership of the group was drawn from a wide range of people including hunters, conservationists, ranchers, and businesspeople.



Crow Creek Falls

Collaboration

Folks representing USFS, FWP, BLM, Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Broadwater counties, RMEF, and the Montana Extension Service met throughout the remainder of 2001 and came up with the idea to form a working group. These entities formed the Elkhorn Sponsoring Group, which solicited and selected people to be a part on the working group. Folks were invited to apply for membership in the EWG. And thus the EWG was formed. The group's stated tasks were to use a collaborative process to make management recommendations to the agencies, help respond to FWP Commission's request for review of elk management in the Elkhorns, and assist the USFS in revision of the Helena National Forest Plan. The original members were Tom Williams, Toston, Nelson Wert, Townsend, Paul Smith, Boulder, Chuck Ruzicka, Helena, Jim Posewitz, Helena, David Brown, Helena, Dave Baum, Helena, Darrell Baum, Winston, Denise Pengeroth FS, Craig Jourdonnais, , FWP, Kevin Edinger, BLM, Cathy Brown, Helena, Mark Donovan, Bozeman, Harry Johnson, Townsend, Craig Knowles, Boulder, Steve Pilcher, Helena, Robert Tomich, Boulder, Sam Samson, Boulder, and Vince Yannone, Clancy. Those underlined are still members.

Virginia Tribe from Missoula was hired by the Sponsoring Group to facilitate the meetings and help us come up with a product by July. This was accomplished as the working group, through consensus, put together a document titled "Final Recommendations of the Elkhorn Working Group, July, 2002". This document is available to the public at the MDFWP, 930 Custer Ave, Helena.

The first meeting was held in February, 2002. This meeting established the ground rules for the working group meetings, introduced the members and developed a charter and process objectives. The second meeting (April 2) jumped into problem solving and issue discussion. The third meeting (April 29), we worked in

small groups, bringing ideas and recommendations to the whole group. Also, a public meeting was held on April 29, at which time public comments were taken regarding management of the Elkhorns. The fourth meeting was May 14 and 15, 7 - 8 hours each. This meeting was drafting the first cut at recommendations. The next meeting was June 10, at which time, the draft recommendations were finalized and a public meeting held from 6:00 - 8:00 pm.

The final meeting was June 26 at which time it was decided to print the recommendations in booklet form to be presented to the Sponsoring Group members and the public. It was decided to keep the EWG active to follow up on the recommendations and continue as a citizen working group. A final note, the EWG put in long, dedicated hours. The meetings were long, half day at the shortest, some continuing into a second day. It took a serious commitment by all members.



Elkhorns Working Group field trip

Vegetation and Utilization Study

The Working Group shares the vision of managing the Elkhorns as a wildlife and recreation management unit while providing livestock grazing on public lands. Through our final recommendations, the Working Group has identified the need for an independent review of existing vegetation data and an inventory of vegetation and grazing characteristics of wildlife and livestock in selected livestock grazing allotments within the Elkhorns and on adjoining, cooperating private lands.



Collecting field data



Dual Use—elk and cattle sharing the range!

In February, 2004, the Ecosystem Research Group of Missoula won the contract to do this study. Preliminary recommendations include increasing weed control efforts and prescribed burning to improve forage. Final data and recommendations are now available.

For more information on the utilization study, visit ERG's website!

<http://www.ecosystemrg.com>

Next Steps

The Working Group will use the data from the vegetation and utilization study to make recommendations to the public agencies in regards to habitat management, wildlife management, grazing, recreation, weed control, roads, trails, and other management issues.

The group's stated tasks include using a collaborative process. Furthermore, we will continue to make management recommendations to the agencies, help respond to FWP Commission's request for review of elk management in the Elkhorns, and assist the USFS in revision of the Helena National Forest Plan.

We will continue to support local family ranches and their lifestyle and land acquisitions that provide oppor-

tunities for wildlife management and cattle grazing.



Example of forage utilization (vegetation study)

Other Successes

The Working remains an important citizen group, having offered recommendations on the statewide Elk Management Plan, hunting seasons, as well as other issues involved with the mountain range. The EWG has held tours every summer. Tours have been in the Elkhorns, as well as two field trips to the Wall Creek and Ledford Creek Wildlife Management Areas in Madison County to tour areas where cattle grazing has been utilized in con-

junction with elk use, employing a rest rotation system.



Prescribed fire to benefit bighorn sheep habitat

We participated in the hundred year celebration of the creation of the Elkhorns Reserve. We've provided letters of support and feedback to various happenings in the Elkhorns, from the Iron Mask land acquisition effort to the transfer of management of the limestone hills from the BLM to the Department of Defense.

Elkhorn Working Group Members

Darrell Baum
Dave Baum
David Brown
Leah Compton
Glenn Erickson
Mark Lincoln
Tom Lythgoe
Denise Pengeroth
Jim Posewitz
Chuck Ruzicka
Sam Samson
Bud Smith
Brud Smith
Nelson Wert
Tom Williams
Sarah LaMarr
John Madsen
Sundi West
Ed Finstad

For more information, contact Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Helena Area Office at 495-3260

Working Group Charter and Guiding Principles

WORKING GROUP CHARTER

The purpose of the Elkhorn Mountains Working Group is to advise the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, the USDA Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management in the development of collaborative recommendations related to wildlife/livestock management strategies in the Elkhorn's.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

As members of the Elkhorn Mountains Working Group:

- We believe that hunting is, and will remain, a primary wildlife management tool for regulating game animal populations.
- We recognize the value of domestic livestock grazing on public land.
- We recognize that wildlife management practices contribute to hunting experiences.

- We recognize the need for public access to public lands and understand the need for seasonal management of public use.
- We believe that the Elkhorn Mountains provide unique, non-consumptive recreational opportunities.
- We recognize that management decisions regarding public land may impact private landowners.
- We recognize that local communities and their economies are tied to land use in the Elkhorn's.
- We believe that the public has a stake in the future management of public lands in the Elkhorn's.
- We believe that the health and condition of the land has to come first.

About the Elkhorns

The Elkhorn Mountains, roughly 300,000 acres in southwest Montana, is managed in partnership as the Elkhorn Cooperative Management Area (ECMA), where different agencies work together to manage the mountain range regardless of political boundaries. The ECMA is managed by the Beaverhead-Deerlodge and Helena National Forests, the Butte Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP).

Together, since 1992, these agencies have focused their efforts on the re-introduction of bighorn sheep, a comprehensive travel plan, improved livestock management throughout the mountain range, a strategy for conserv-

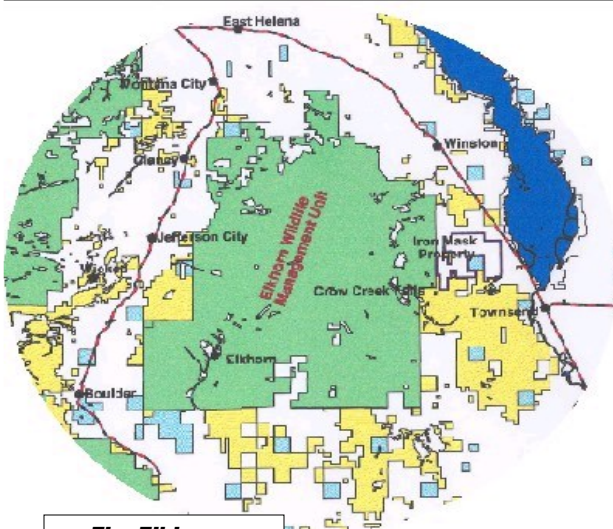
ing cutthroat trout, maintaining and reconstructing trails and trailheads, reintroducing fire as a process on the landscape, reclaiming abandoned mines, as well as a variety of other projects.

From prairie to alpine, mayflies to mountain goats, and scenic driving to tortuous climbing routes.

In the Elkhorns, you will discover diversity! The Elkhorn Mountains are a mountain island, which provide a spectrum of habitats for a wide variety of plants and animals. The Elkhorns are especially known for the beauty and productivity of the plentiful mountain meadows and grassy parks. Both small and large, these open areas provide abundant food for wildlife and livestock, and beautiful vistas and colorful wildflowers for visitors.

For more information on the Elkhorns, visit the website!

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/elkhorns/>



The Elkhorns